



TODAYS  
News



Tuesday, 31 March, 2015



Click on [blue](#) link to view full Press

### EU continues its strong support for the victims of Syria's crisis

The EU significantly increased its funding in response to the [Syria](#) crisis at today's [Third International Pledging Conference for Syria](#) in Kuwait. Together, the European Commission and Member States pledged close to €1.1 billion, double the overall EU pledge at the 2014 Conference. *"The magnitude of the Syria crisis is testing the capacities of the entire international aid system. The needs are overwhelming and an extraordinary effort is needed by the wider donor community to mobilise significant funding. With our substantial contribution, the European Union – Commission and the Member States - shoulders its responsibility to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people,"* said Christos **Stylianides**, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management. Press release available [here](#).

### Giving Citizens a Say: Commission Report on European Citizens' Initiatives

In the past three years, an estimated six million Europeans have supported European Citizens' Initiatives (ECI) and used their voice to bring important causes directly to the attention of European policy makers. Today the European Commission publishes a Report looking at the application of this new tool since its entry into force on 1 April 2012. The fact that two Citizens' Initiatives have gone through the full process shows that the Regulation establishing the ECI has been fully implemented. However, the report acknowledges that there is still room to improve the process and identifies a number of possible issues for further discussion with stakeholders and institutions. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"The ECI is one of the building blocks for strengthening trust in the European institutions and for promoting active participation of citizens in EU policy-making. We must look for innovative ways to encourage greater and more effective use of the tool. This is an important instrument, and we must make sure it lives up to its full potential."* Press release available [here](#).

### Milk quotas come to an end after 31 years in place

Today is the last day of the milk quota regime, introduced in 1984 as a temporary measure to address the structural oversupply on the EU market that had led to the infamous "milk lakes" and "butter mountains". The EU Member States and the European Commission decided in 2003 that quotas would not be prolonged beyond 2015, and since then transitional steps to provide a "soft landing" were put in place, such as a gradual increase of national quotas. Now, with the global demand expected to increase by an average of 2,1% a year, the end of quotas means that EU farmers will be able to fully benefit from this growth, especially for added-value products like cheese. Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, **Phil Hogan**, stressed that *"The end of the era of milk quotas represents the closing of a chapter in the history of*

*the European – and indeed global – dairy sector. It represents the opening of a new chapter – a new era without production constraints.* "Several support measures remain in place for milk producers: from direct payments and voluntary coupled support to investments through rural development programmes or even public intervention and private storage if need be. The Milk Package also reinforces the dairy farmers' position in the market chain. For more information, visit our [dedicated page of the end of milk quotas](#) with links to [Commissioner Hogan's statement](#), a [Q&A](#), a [timeline](#) among others. For market trends, you can visit the [Milk Market Observatory](#).

### **EUROSTAT: Euro area unemployment rate at 11.3% - EU28 at 9.8%**

The euro area (EA19) seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate was 11.3% in February 2015, down from 11.4% in January 2015, and from 11.8% in February 2014. This is the lowest rate recorded in the euro area since May 2012. The EU28 unemployment rate was 9.8% in February 2015, down from 9.9% in January 2015 and from 10.5% in February 2014. This is the lowest rate recorded in the EU28 since September 2011. These figures are published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. Press release available [here](#).

### **EUROSTAT: Euro area annual inflation up to -0.1%**

Euro area annual inflation is expected to be -0.1% in March 2015, up from -0.3% in February, according to a flash estimate<sup>4</sup> from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. Looking at the main components of euro area inflation, services is expected to have the highest annual rate in March (1.0%, compared with 1.2% in February), followed by food, alcohol & tobacco (0.6%, compared with 0.5% in February), non-energy industrial goods (-0.1%, stable compared with February) and energy (-5.8%, compared with -7.9% in February). Press release available [here](#).

MEX/15/4735



See what will be discussed in the European Commission, European Council and the European Parliament [here](#)

